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## **Testimony on HB 6676: AAC Licensure of Clinical Social Workers**

### **Public Health Committee**

**March 16, 2008**

**Submitted By: Stephen Karp, MSW, Executive Director**

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter representing over 3400 members, we offer this testimony in support of HB 6676: AAC Licensure of Clinical Social Workers.

HB 6676 expands the current clinical social work licensure statute that has been in effect since 1995. The current law served the social work profession well for many years however changes in the field of social work demand that additional licensure levels now be enacted.

The key provisions and reasons for expanding licensure are as follows:

- New MSW graduates seeking to practice clinical social work currently need 3000 hours of post-graduate experience before being licensed. Over the past five years the work environment has changed to the point where employers want licensed social workers. This change is most prominently seen in health care settings however increasingly is found to be the case for a wide range of social work jobs. This leaves our new graduates in a "catch 22". They cannot get the experience without a job and to get the job they need a license. This bill offers an appropriate level of licensure that will open up the job market to recent MSW graduates.
- Forty-five states already have multiple levels of licensure, including new MSW graduate licensure. All the contiguous states to CT have new graduate licenses. Because we only have single level licensure our state's graduates are accepting jobs in New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island where they can be licensed. HB 6676 will encourage new graduates to find work in CT.
- Consumers have an expectation of being protected against unethical practice by health care practitioners. Consumers should also have the right to file a complaint when they allege unethical practice. However, in the case of clinical social work services the consumer does not have a vehicle for filing a regulatory complaint if the practitioner is not yet licensed. HB 6676 provides consumers this very important protection.
- Consumers also have the right to know that the practitioner they are seeing is a properly trained professional. Unfortunately "social worker" is not a protected title in CT so anyone can be called a social worker. HB 6676 partially addresses this consumer issue by expanding clinical social licensure to all clinical social workers. Consumers will be

assured that by seeing a **licensed** social worker that the worker has a Master degree in Social Work and has passed a nationally recognized examination.

- Currently a loophole exists in the clinical social work statute that allows new graduates to immediately go into independent private practice. NASW believes that new graduates should have post graduate experience under professional supervision prior to “putting out a shingle”. HB 6676 closes this loophole by requiring the social worker to attain the highest level of licensure - LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker) prior to entering into independent practice. Again, this is a consumer protection as well as upholding the highest standards of practice.
- HB 6676 is revenue positive. We anticipate that it will bring in an additional \$150,000 in revenue annually and in the first year will generate approximately \$325,000 due to a grandfathering clause. The only cost to the State of Connecticut is administering the licensing program through the Department of Public Health (DPH), which will cost the state less than the revenue raised in fees.
- State employees are exempt from the new graduate license. There is no impact on state personnel.

**NASW/CT requests that in Section 5. ( c ) exemption number two (2) be deleted.** This language is in the current law to allow new graduates to practice clinical social work while working toward their LCSW. With the addition of a LMSW this exemption is no longer required and in fact exempts the social workers we are licensing in HB 6676. NASW will gladly work with the committee on this change.

Expansion of social work licensure will bring Connecticut in line with 45 other states and the District of Columbia that license new MSW graduates. It will assure a qualified social work workforce and offer increased consumer protection. Newly graduated social workers will have an easier time finding work thus be more likely to remain in Connecticut. The State will gain from having a more qualified workforce and by the generation of increased revenue from licensure fees.

NASW/CT urges you to support HB 6676: AAC Licensure of Clinical Social Workers.